



VM Productions presents:  
a film by Vitaly Sumin

# Shades *of Day*

Director's Cut 2019

*Based on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's classic love story "White Nights"*

## Press Kit



[www.shadesofday.com](http://www.shadesofday.com)



# Professional and critical acclaim



**Shades of Day** – was selected by the Rutgers University’s professor Gerard Pirog for his course in cinema, along with the classic works by Bertolucci, Kurosawa, Bresson, Scorsese, Shrader, Von Sternberg...

[www.shadesofday.com/critics.htm](http://www.shadesofday.com/critics.htm)

**“The film has a magical look... Quite an achievement!”**

*Jonathan Dana, producer, former Director of Acquisition and Development for Samuel Goldwyn Company.*

**“Crisply shot, the film has a gritty quality that captures the struggling underside of LA. In some ways it is Director Sumin’s hymn to Los Angeles.”**

*Wade Major, film critic - ENTERTAINMENT TODAY*

**“Stunning visuals!..”**

*Francesca Elizabeth Miller, film critic - - IN LA MAGAZINE, NIGHTLIFE TONIGHT*

**“Camilla Bergstrom as “Linda” is a real find. She has a haunted, enigmatic appeal that lights up the screen.”**

**“Philippe Bergeron, who plays “Gary”, almost steals every scene in which he appears. He has a particular talent for mugging at the camera that is both poignant and hilarious.”**

**“Well written, the ending will surprise you... it was definitely not what I expected.”**

*Mark Lewis, film critic - KXLU-FM, KCSN-FM, CRN*

# Synopsis

Steven Prescott (Alexander Smith) is drifting through his days. He works as a security guard, having given up on his dream of becoming a successful screenwriter.

Then one day he comes upon a gang of young toughs assaulting a young woman. He rescues her and brings her home.

Recovering quickly, the woman, named Linda (Camilla Bergstrom), begins to puncture the complacency that shrouds Steven's existence. He's somewhat distressed by this, but is also drawn to the beautiful intruder.

Linda, however, is carrying a torch for her former lover Paul (Brian Paul Stuart), a brilliant African-American astronomy student who has pushed her out of his life to concentrate on his Ph.D. The plan is for them to meet again in two years when he's completed his studies.

The plot thickens when Linda persuades Steven to spy on Paul, with strict instructions not to make contact. Steven disobeys her instructions and begins to develop a friendship with his unsuspecting rival.

Steven also becomes Linda's lover in a race to win her heart before the scheduled reunion.

Along the way, Linda has a tryst with film producer Gary Huy (Philippe Bergeron) who has offered her the starring role in his next production.

Steven's relationship with Linda blossoms meanwhile until she discovers a novel he's writing to exorcise his guilt over stealing her from Paul. This ironically serves to reignite her previous passion. Distraught, the idealistic writer is driven to a supreme act of betrayal and deceit.

Events take strange and unexpected turns as one extraordinary scene tumbles into the next. These include a mysterious masked sexual encounter, murder at the hands of the Russian mafia, and a dramatic showdown between Linda, Steven, and Paul - all of which leads to an unforeseen conclusion and, out of chaos, a new beginning.





# About the production

*Shades of Day* is a contemporary fable, a love story that explores the mysteries of the human soul. As its serpentine plot unfolds, we cross and re-cross the thin line that separates tragedy and comedy.

And what could provide a more suitable backdrop for the proceedings than Hollywood - city of illusion.



# The script

The saga of the film itself begins with a brilliant script by director Vitaly Sumin and playwright Jeff Bergquist. It was based on an original story by Sumin, which in turn was inspired by Feodor Dostoyevsky's *White Nights*, one of the greatest love stories ever written.

In Europe, Dostoevsky's story has been the subject of numerous adaptations for theatre, television, and the cinema. One of the most successful remains Lucino Visconti's award-winning *White Nights* (1957, Venice Film Festival), which starred Marcello Mastroianni, Maria Schell, and Jean Marais.

In transporting the essential elements of *White Nights* from mid-19th century Russia to modern-day California, Sumin has underscored the universality of Dostoyevsky's tale as well as the commonalities of the human experience.

Bringing the visionary *Shades of Day* script to filmic fruition presented a daunting challenge. Here was a story that functioned on multiple levels, an intimate story with an epic structure, its textures woven with strands of symbolism and subtext.



# Hollywood dreams

On one level, Sumin is presenting an homage to the Hollywood film, particularly of the silent era. The famous Hollywood sign is employed to great effect in the background of several key scenes, along with other famous Tinseltown attractions including Mann's Chinese Theatre, the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and a cemetery of the stars.

Within the cemetery, several poignant scenes take place at the grave of Charlie Chaplin. But this is, after all, a film about dreams and reality (in that order) - director Sumin notes with a certain mischievous glee that Chaplin is actually buried in Switzerland.



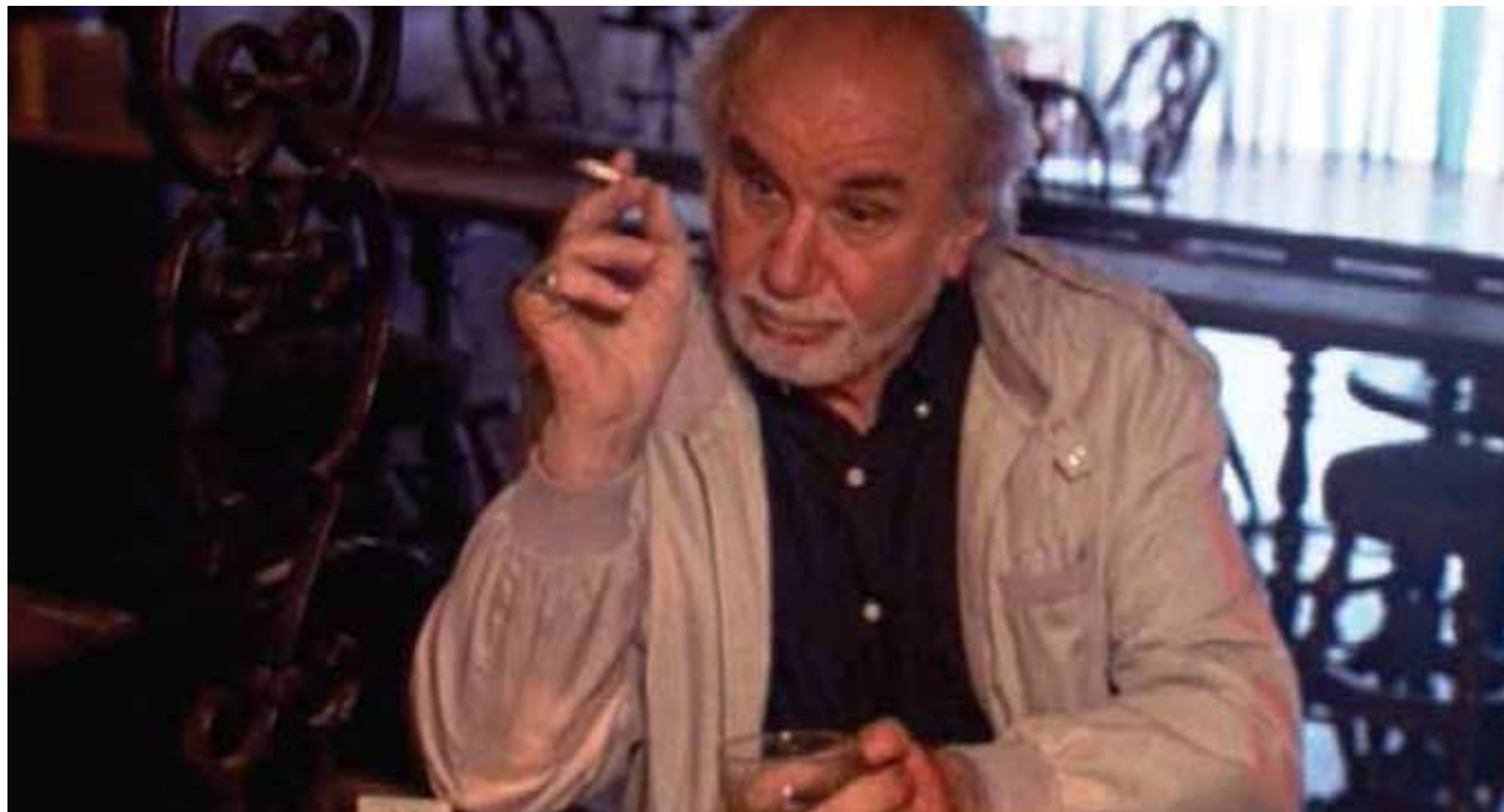




# Black & white and color

*Shades of Day* is shot in both black and white and color; the shots and sequences in color represent dreams, desires, and hopes. For example, after signing a contract with a movie producer of questionable repute, the lead character of Linda happily relates the turn of events to Sam, her customer at the hotel bar where she works. The skeptical Sam sees Linda in black and white while the dreamer Linda observes him in vivid color.

This black and white to color technique harkens back to such classics from Hollywood's "golden age" as *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Secret Garden*, where the new technicolor process was used for the "magical" parts of the films. *Shades of Day* employs the approach with unprecedented subtlety by incorporating color at unexpected places in various scenes. When contrasted with its extraordinary black and white cinematography (which conveys in each frame the "shades" of the title), the effect is stunning and evocative.





# Voices

Perhaps the filmmakers' most daring choice involves sound, specifically the “voices” that are heard by the lead characters. These are the voices of inanimate objects (a desk, a gun, various edifices on Hollywood Boulevard...) and of the dead (in the film's cemetery scenes). This expands on Dostoevsky's concept in *White Nights*, where the characters speak to buildings exclusively.

The challenge was to incorporate this surrealistic element without undercutting the reality or the mood of the piece.

After careful consideration, Sumin arrived at a crucial decision as the film went into post-production. Though actors had been cast to provide the “voices,” he replaced them with the lead and supporting actors who appear on screen—their natural voices were altered through technical means and acting technique (different accents, intonations, etc.). The idea was that the “voices” were actually projections of the imagination of the character who hears them and should therefore be based on voices that actually exist in the character's world.







This sound design meshes perfectly with its visual counterpart. The idea was to coordinate sound and picture to capture the subtle interplay of the characters and the “voices” they hear.

Generally, when we hear a “voice,” we’re seeing the character who’s interacting with it. And conversely, when we’re hearing the character we’re seeing the source of the “voice.” The logic of this motif lies in the fact that, as stated above, the voices are actually ego projections of the characters who hear them.

In one striking scene the lead character of Linda, played by Camilla Bergstrom, has a conversation with a golden pin which had been owned by her stem grandmother. The pin, which speaks with the voice of the grandmother, is actually played by Bergstrom herself - the haunting effect was achieved after extensive sonic experimentation.



Another instance occurs during Linda’s job interview with Marsha, the smug, uptight personnel director of a luxury hotel. Bored by the questioning, Linda engages in an imaginary conversation with Marsha’s desk, which attempts to warn Linda about the pitfalls of the position she’s applying for, then attempts to woo her, and ultimately is protected by the girl’s hand from the pensive tapping of Marsha’s pen. The voice of the desk is provided by Brian Paul Stuart, who plays Linda’s fiance Paul. We actually hear Stuart as the desk (though the voice has been altered) before we hear him as Paul. Thus the quirky and comical interaction between Linda and the desk foreshadows the complex relationship between Linda and Paul.

Throughout the film, the “voices” are heard singly, in chorus, and in crescendo in a masterpiece of sound design. Sumin’s approach serves to subliminally integrate the dreams and reality of the story.



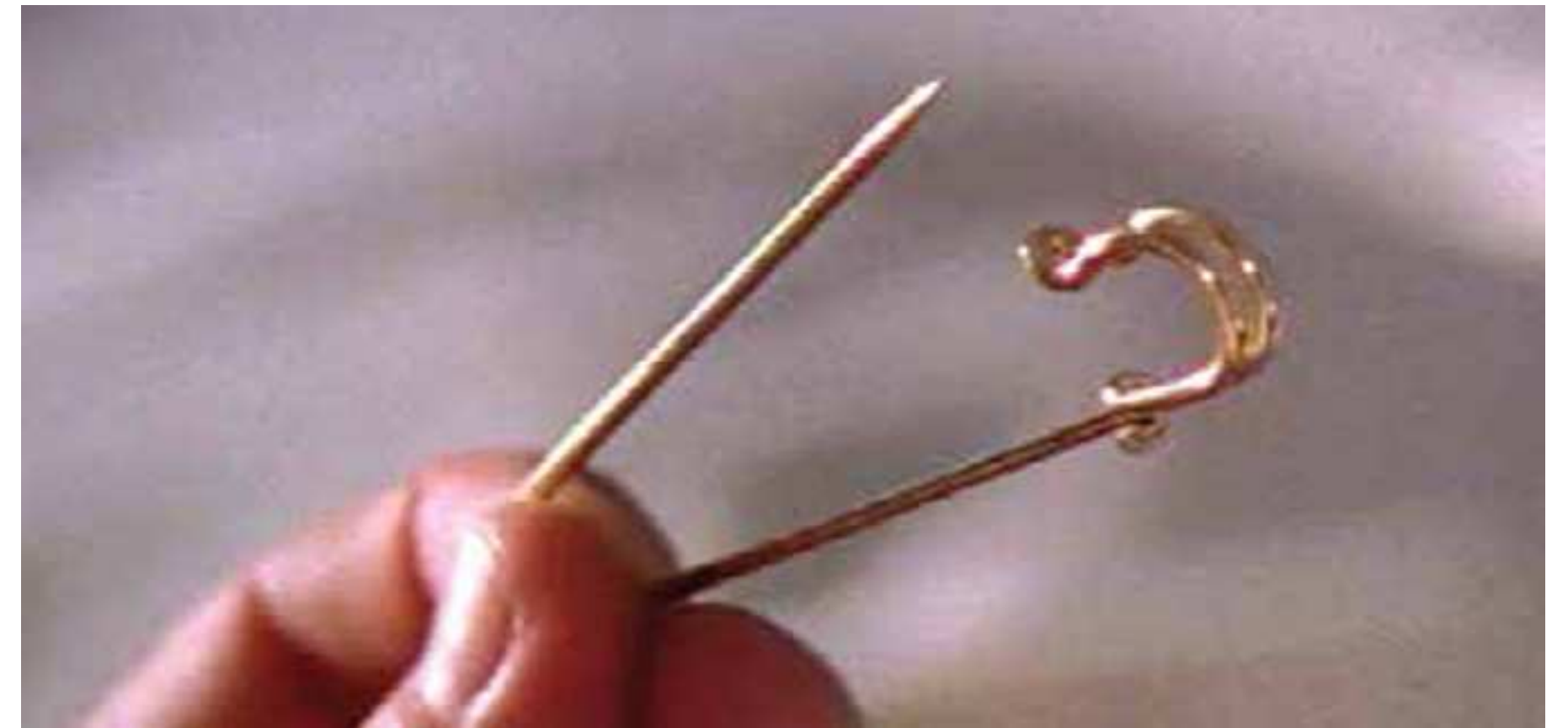
# The golden pin and the music

In Dostoevsky's *White Nights*, Nathaly (the prototype for Unda in *Shades of Day*) reveals to the Dreamer (the prototype for Steven) that, when she was a child, her blind grandmother used a pin to attach their clothes together to prevent her from wandering off.

In *Shades of Day*, the concept of the pin is evolved further to represent Linda's passage from enslavement to liberation. The everyday pin is upgraded to a symbolic golden pin.

In an extraordinary flashback we see young Linda and her grandmother (played respectively by six year old Olivia Watson and Sherri Morse) joined by the pin. The grandmother decides to test the child's faithfulness by pretending to fall asleep. Linda carefully opens the pin and is about to escape when her grandmother suddenly grabs her and slaps her in the face.

In a desperate attempt to attain liberation through an act of protest, Linda uses the pin to pierce her own palm. She watches with a strange fascination as the blood begins to flow.



Musically, the scene is underscored with a chorus singing “*Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder*” from **St Matthew's Passion** by Johann Sebastian Bach (as brilliantly performed by the BBC ensemble, conducted by Paul Goodwin).

Later Linda comes into Steven's bedroom, undresses, and proposes that they try living together for one year before her scheduled reunion with Paul. When she opens her hand revealing the golden pin, Steven takes it and attempts to pierce his own palm in solidarity with her childhood act of protest. She stops him with the words: “You don't have to do it! I've already done it...”





For Linda, the pin represents her unique connection to the vast mystery of life; the connection is hers alone - it's not to be coopted by Steven or anyone else.

Steven responds to Linda's intercession by tenderly kissing her scarred palm, an act that precedes their making love for the first time. (During a later love scene we see the golden pin mounted in a beautiful frame above their bed.)

Near the end of the film, Linda lets the pin fall from her hand and leaves it lying on the ground in the "cemetery of the stars." This happens at the grave of producer Gary Huy, whom Linda has come to love dearly despite her initial suspicion about his motives.

As she walks away, Linda realizes that she no longer needs the crutch of the golden pin. She's finally achieved her liberation. Along with the pin, she can let go of her past and her deepest fears.

The two scenes described above involving the golden pin and the grown up Linda are underscored with original music, the result of a fruitful collaboration between Sumin and award-winning composer Cengiz Yaltkaya.

The music consists for the most part of contemporary inventions based on '**St Matthew's Passion**', Bach's profound exploration of suffering and the human condition (first heard in Linda's flashback). Even when Yaltkaya presents us with a jaunty piece that would be right at home in a Broadway musical, the soul of Bach isn't far beneath the surface.

Special mention should be made of the director's and the composer's musical homage to the silent film, consisting of original ragtime brilliantly performed on piano. It's heard during the unique black and white sequences that hearken back to the wild burlesque and madcap chases of the silent era.





# Visual elements

In *Shades of Day*, with its quality of magical realism, the movie screen had to function as a window looking into a parallel world. The film needed a “look” that would capture its singular vision. Enter Gus Blaudziunas, award-winning cinematographer.

Blaudziunas and Sumin collaborated in pre-production for several months, a major investment of time that was necessary to attain the filmic quality required for the story. Chosen locations were meticulously mapped, photographed, and videotaped. Based on this material, the director and cinematographer designed detailed storyboards for each scene and came to a consensus on basic visual elements, composition, key camera movements, and angles, as well as the type of lens to be used for each shot. Thus the style and pace of the movie were determined long before a frame of film was exposed.





# The search for Linda

But, without a doubt, the most critical decisions in the creation of *Shades of Day* were those involved in casting.

Auditions began during April of last year at the Gardner Stage in Los Angeles. By June, all the key roles had been cast except for one - the pivotal role of Linda.

Shooting was scheduled to begin in July. All the elements were in place but no Linda had been found. More than two hundred actresses had auditioned to date.

Several were quite good and, in a number of instances, Sumin was advised that this actress or that would be fine in the part. Despite mounting pressure to get the production rolling he held out, postponing the start of the shoot.

While some would attribute these delays to directorial stubbornness. Sumin, as the originator of the character, knew what he wanted.

Linda as written is quite simply the role of a lifetime. She's the engine that drives the story. Ever-changing, she's a study in contrasts, veering from vulnerable to strong, from tender to devilishly mischievous. Her magnetic life-force alters everyone who comes within its range.





By August, no Linda had been found and the situation was growing grim. The house of cards that had been painstakingly assembled in terms of cast, crew, equipment, and locations was in danger of falling apart.

Meanwhile auditions continued at the Gardner Stage - a weekly stream of young actresses read selected scenes from the script. All auditions were videotaped for possible later review.

In mid-August, Camilla Bergstrom read for the part. Her audition performance was unique and haunting - it conveyed the depth of spirit required for the role of Linda.

Sumin was hopeful but not convinced. In his worldview, life is a tragedy wrapped around a core of comedy. Linda, for him, needed to manifest a quality that he referred to as “circus” - a dancing energy that could be sensed in her face, her voice, and her movement.

A second audition clinched it - Camilla proved to be an effervescent presence and a natural clown. Sumin had his Linda. The production of *Shades of Day* could go forward.





# The shoot

In mid-September, rehearsals began and lasted until the start of shooting in November, four months later than originally planned. Each rehearsal session was videotaped to allow performances to be analyzed and discussed by the director and the actors. (Camilla

Bergstrom has since expressed admiration for Sumin's directorial style of "knowing exactly what he wants" while allowing her "the freedom...to explore and improvise" as an actress.)



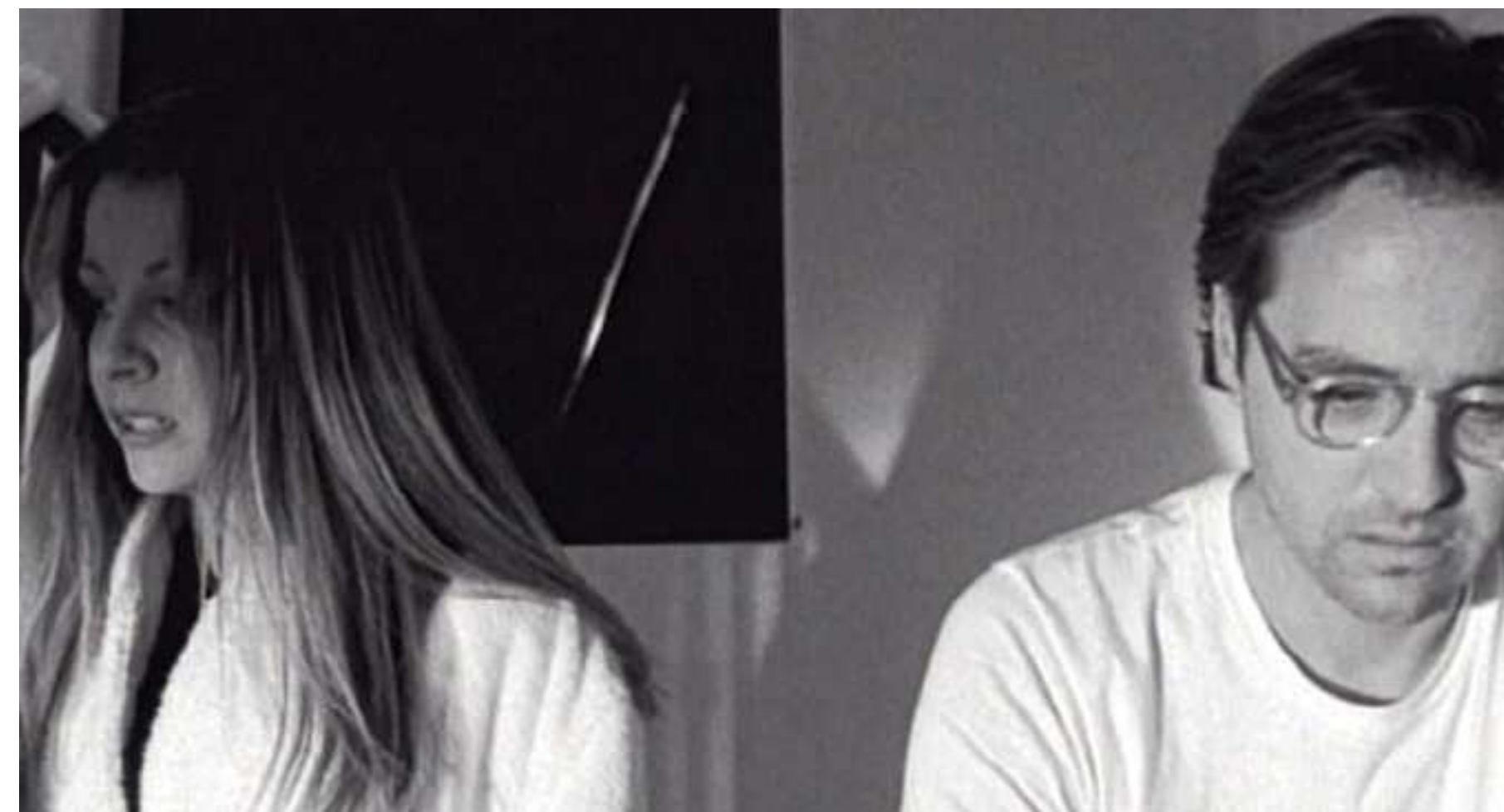




The shooting schedule was somewhere between unrealistic and insane. It extended over nineteen days and twenty locations. This was where the pre-planning kicked in. Thanks to the storyboarding and the videotaped rehearsals, nearly all the scenes were shot in one or two takes.

An outstanding crew endured various crisis and the rigors of shooting six days a week and an average of fourteen hours a day.

Perhaps the most powerful scene in *Shades of Day* involves the break-up of the rela-



tionship between Linda and her lover Steven. As the scene was conceived, the two argue violently while descending a staircase (ascending and descending constitute a visual motif in the film). It was shot at 2 AM at the end of a long day; the grueling schedule which had taken its toll on the crew only served to enhance the rawness of the actors' performances.

The scene was captured with a continuous, choreographed movement of the camera. When Sumin yelled "Cut!" the entire crew burst into spontaneous applause. A second take was deemed unnecessary.





*Shades of Day - partial crew and actors. The director (Vitaly Sumin) is the 2nd standing on the left*



# **Shades** *of Day*

director's cut



Text: Vitaly Sumin, Dan Marcus  
Graphic design - Ivan Radovanovic (La Vague Design)  
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